

EXPOSITORY THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPELS.

FOR FAMILY AND PRIVATE USE.

WITH THE TEXT COMPLETE,

And Many Explanatory Notes.

BY THE REV. J. C. RYLE, B. A.,

CHRIST CHURCH, OXFORD,
VICAR OF STRADBROOKE, SUFFOLK;

Author of "Home Truths," etc.

ST. LUKE. VOL. I.

LONDON:
WILLIAM HUNT AND COMPANY, 23, HOLLES STREET.
CAVENDISH SQUARE

IPSWICH: WILLIAM HUNT, TAVERN STREET.

MDCCCLVIII.

LUXE IX. 57–62.

57 And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain *man* said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest.

68 And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air *have* nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay *his* head.

69 And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

60 Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God.

61 And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house.

62 And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.

THE passage of Scripture we have just read is a very remarkable one. It contains three short sayings of peculiar solemnity, addressed by our Lord Jesus Christ to three different persons. We know nothing of the names of those persons. We know nothing of the effect which our Lord's words produced upon them. But we need not doubt that each was addressed in the way which his character required, and we may be sure that the passage is specially intended to promote self inquiry.

The first of these sayings was addressed to *one who offered to be a disciple unconditionally, and of his own accord.* "Lord," said this man, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest."—That offer sounded well. It was a step in advance of many. Thousands of people heard our Lord's sermons who never thought of saying what this man said. Yet he who made this offer was evidently speaking without thought. He had never considered what belonged to discipleship. He had never counted the cost. And hence he needed the grave reply which his offer called forth:—"Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man hath not where to lay his head."—He must weigh well what he was taking in hand. He must not suppose that Christ's service was all pleasure and smooth sailing. Was he prepared for this? Was he ready to "endure hardness?" (2 Tim. ii. 3.) If not, he had better withdraw his application to be a disciple.

Let us learn, from our Lord's words on this occasion, that He would have all who profess and call themselves Christians reminded that they must carry the cross. They must lay their account to be despised, and afflicted, and tried, like their Master. He would have no man enlisted on false pretences. He would have it distinctly understood that there is a battle to be fought, and a race to be run,—a work to be done, and many hard things to be endured,—if we propose to follow Him. Salvation He is ready to bestow, without money and without price. Grace by the way, and glory in the end, shall be given to every sinner who comes to Him. But He would not have us ignorant that we shall have deadly enemies,—the world, the flesh, and the devil, and that many will hate us, slander us, and persecute us, if we become His disciples. He does not wish to discourage us, but He does wish us to know the truth.

Well would it have been for the church if our Lord's warning had been more frequently pondered! Many a man begins a religious life full of warmth and zeal, and by and bye loses all his first love, and turns back again to the world. He liked the new uniform, and the bounty money, and the name of a Christian soldier.—He never considered the watching, and warring, and wounds, and conflicts, which Christian soldiers must endure. Let us never forget this lesson. It need not make us afraid to begin serving Christ, but it ought to make us begin carefully, humbly, and with much prayer for grace. If we are not ready to take part in the afflictions of Christ, we must never expect to share His glory.

The second of our Lord's sayings is addressed to *one whom He invited to follow Him*. The answer He received was a very remarkable one. "Lord," said the man, "suffer me first to go and bury my father."—The thing he requested was in itself harmless. But the time at which the request was made was unseasonable. Affairs of far greater importance than even a father's funeral demanded the man's immediate attention. There would always be plenty of people ready and fit to take charge of a funeral. But there was at that moment a pressing want of labourers to do Christ's work in the world. And hence the man's request drew from our Lord the solemn reply,—"Let the dead bury their dead, but go thou and preach the kingdom of God."

Let us learn, from this saying, to beware of allowing family and social duties to interfere with our duty to Christ. Funerals, and marriages, and visits of courtesy, and the like, unquestionably are not in themselves sinful. But when they are allowed to absorb a believer's time, and keep him back from any plain religious duty, they become a snare to his soul. That the children of the world, and the unconverted, should allow them to occupy all their time and thoughts is not wonderful. They know nothing higher, and better, and more important. "Let the dead bury their dead."—But the heirs of glory, and children of the King of kings, should be men of a different stamp. They should declare plainly, by their conduct, that the world to come is the great reality which fills their thoughts. They should not be ashamed to let men see that they have no time either to rejoice or to sorrow like others who have no hope. (1 Thess. iv. 13.) Their Master's work waits for them, and their Master's work must have the chief place in their hearts. They are God's priests in the world, and, like the priests of old, their mourning must be kept carefully within bounds. (Lev. xxi. 1.) "Weeping," says an old divine, "must not hinder working," and mourning must not be allowed to run into excess.

The third of our Lord's sayings in this passage was addressed to *one who volunteered to follow Him, but marred the grace of his offer by interposing a request*. "Lord," he said, "I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell which are at home at my house."—The answer he received shows

plainly that the man's heart was not yet thoroughly engaged in Christ's service, and that he was therefore unfit to be a disciple. "Jesus said unto him, No man having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

We learn from this saying that it is impossible to serve Christ with a divided heart. If we are looking back to anything in this world we are not fit to be disciples. Those who look back, like Lot's wife, want to go back. Jesus will not share His throne with anyone,—no, not with our dearest relatives. He must have all our heart, or none. No doubt we are to honour father and mother, and love all around us. But when love to Christ and love to relatives come in collision, Christ must have the preference. We must be ready, like Abraham, if needs be, to come out from kindred and father's house for Christ's sake. We must be prepared in case of necessity, like Moses, to turn our backs even on those who have brought us up, if God calls us, and the path is plain. Such decided conduct may entail sore trials on our affections. It may wring our hearts to go contrary to the opinions of those we love.—But such conduct may sometimes be positively necessary to our salvation, and without it, when it becomes necessary, we are unfit for the kingdom of God. The good soldier will not allow his heart to be entangled too much with his home. If he daily gives way to unmanly repinings about those he has left behind him, he will never be fit for a campaign. His present duties—the watching, the marching, the fighting,—must have the principal place in his thoughts. So must it be with all who would serve Christ. They must beware of softness spoiling their characters as Christians. They must endure hardness, as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. (2 Tim. ii. 3.)

Let us leave the whole passage with many searchings of heart. The times are undoubtedly much changed since our Lord spoke these words. Not many are called to make such real sacrifices for Christ's sake as when Christ was upon earth. But the heart of man never changes. The difficulties of salvation are still very great. The atmosphere of the world is still very unfavourable to spiritual religion. There is still need for thorough, unflinching, whole-hearted decision, if we would reach heaven. Let us aim at nothing less than this decision. Let us be willing to do anything, and suffer anything, and give up everything for Christ's sake. It may cost us something for a few years, but great will be the reward in eternity.

NOTES. LUKE IX. 57–62.

57.—[*A certain man said.*] St. Matthew tells us that this man was a scribe. This offer appears to have been made at an early period of our Lord's earthly ministry. (Matt. viii. 19.) St. Luke mentions it in this place, because it is his habit to relate events in groups, and not in strict chronological order. See Luke i. 3, and the note thereon.

58.—[*Foxes have holes, &c.*] This expression throws strong light on the poverty and low-

liness in which our Lord was pleased to pass the time of His ministry.

Let our Lord's reply to this man's offer be carefully noted. Both here and elsewhere we find Him putting forward prominently the cross which must be borne, if the man becomes a Christian. The conduct of those ministers and Christians who keep back the trials of Christianity from inquirers, and suppress the cross in order to swell the ranks of their own sect, or party, or congregation, is very unlike the conduct of Christ. To obtain adherents to our ranks by incorrect and partial statements, is a procedure to which no Christian should ever condescend. Better a small congregation honestly obtained, than a large one gathered by false representations.

- 59.—[*First to go and bury my father.*] There is probably more implied in this expression than at first sight appears. It means something more than merely attending the funeral of a deceased parent.

Theophylact and Pellican think that it means, "to take care of a father until he is dead," and that it implies a wish to attend upon an aged father during all the infirmities of his latter days, until he was released by death.

Heinsius thinks that there is a reference to the many tedious and superstitious practices of the Jews in connexion with deaths and funerals, such as a seven days' lamentation before the burial of a father, and a year's special mourning after his funeral.

There is some probability in both these opinions.

- 60.—[*Let the dead bury their dead.*] The first word, "dead," in this expression, means the "spiritually dead," the second the "naturally dead." The meaning evidently is, that funerals may be safely left to those who, being without spiritual life themselves, attach importance to all ceremonies and customs belonging to this life, and are sure to attend to them.

[*Go thou and preach.*] It is not unlikely that this command to go and preach was delivered just before our Lord selected the seventy preachers mentioned in the next chapter. If this man had been ready he might have been one of the seventy.

- 61.—[*Bid...farewell.*] The Greek word so translated is peculiar. In Mark vi. 40, it is rendered "sent away;" in Luke xiv. 33, it is "forsaketh;" but in Acts xviii. 18, 21, and 2 Cor. ii. 13, it is "taking leave," and "bidding farewell."

Heinsius thinks that it should be translated, "suffer me first to go and give my commands" to them at home, as if the man was about to die, or take a long journey.

It is probable, that, like the expression, "bury my father," more is implied than appears. Had the desire to bid farewell been like the simple wish of Elisha, "to kiss his father and mother," when Elijah called him, our Lord would hardly have said what He did. (1 Kings xix. 20.) It is evident at any rate that our Lord saw the man's heart was more at his home than at his work.

- 62.—[*Fit for the kingdom.*] In this proverb the Greek word rendered, "fit," is remarkable, and only used here and Luke xiv. 35, and Heb. vi. 7. It means literally, "well-placed," or "well-disposed."—It implies that a man wanting to go home to take leave of his friends is not rightly disposed for Gospel work, any more than a man looking behind him is rightly placed for ploughing.

Let it be noted in the whole passage, that both in the second and third cases the grand fault manifestly was the desire to do something "first," (59, 61 verses) before doing Christ's work.